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ABSTRACT

Through a survey of 41 North Carolina educators, this study investigated teachers' perceptions of the effects of violent television programs on elementary school students' classroom behavior. The research was designed to be descriptive; it employed a 13-item questionnaire which could be completed in about 5 minutes. Subjects were 34 female and 7 male teachers; 21 were from urban school districts, and 20 were from rural school districts. Findings included the following: (1) 87.8 percent of the teachers agreed that television violence contributed significantly to students' violent behavior; (2) 90.3 percent believed that male elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in school; (3) 70.8 percent felt that parents could lessen the chances of their children engaging in violent behavior by watching television with their children and indicating that violent acts on television are wrong when they occur; (4) 90.2 percent felt that parental screening of television content would help prevent classroom violence; (5) 36.6 percent were unaware of the violent cartoons children were watching; and (6) only 4.9 percent were using cartoons as teaching tools. (JW)

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Television and Violent Classroom Behaviors: Implications for the Training of Elementary School Teachers

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by

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Abstract

We conducted this research investigation to ascertain educators' perceptions of the effects of violent television programs on the behaviors of elementary school children. Our survey study employed a thirteen item questionnaire with five demographic items. The thirteen survey items came from our six hypotheses. The survey items were field-tested using five educators. Forty-one educators from the state of North Carolina completed the surveys. Data were collected and analyzed for each of the six hypotheses. A summary of our findings for each hypothesis was:

(H1): 87.8% or 36 of the educators perceived that excessive violence on TV contributed significantly to the violent behaviors demonstrated by elementary school children in the school environment.

(H2): Educators perceived that male elementary school students (90.3% or 37) were more influenced by characters in violent TV roles than female elementary students (39.1% or 16). They indicated that White female students (26.8% or 11) were the least influenced and Black male students (87.8% or 36) were the greatest influenced.

(H3): 70.8% or 29 of the educators indicated that parents who take

the time to point out to children that TV violence is wrong, according to societal expectations, will reduce the chances of the children demonstrating violent behaviors in the school environment.

(H4): 90.2% or 37 of the educators perceived that parental screening of violent television programs would reduce the chances of elementary school children demonstrating violent behaviors in the school environment.

(H5): About one-third of the teachers appeared to be unaware of the violent cartoons (36.6% or 15) and the nonviolent cartoons (34.1% or 14) that elementary school children were watching.

(H6): Few teachers (4.9% or 2) were using cartoons as teaching strategies in the classrooms.

Based on our findings, we provided curriculum and instructional strategies to reduce the violence in the school environment.

Methodology

The research design was descriptive in nature. It was descriptive because a 13 item questionnaire was used to collect data relative to educators' perceptions on six hypotheses. The surveys were field tested by having five educators critique the survey items for vague items, misleading items, inappropriate items, etc. Survey items were primarily designed on a five point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). They were also designed to be very brief and the average completion time was five minutes. All surveys were administered to the 41 educators by one of us who was available to answer any questions. The educators participating in the survey

were 82.9% (34) female, 17.1% (7) males, 80.5% (33) White, 17.1% (7) Black, 2.4% (1) Hispanic, 51.2% (21) from an urban school district, and 48.8% (20) from a rural school district. It was emphasized to the educators to be honest and that all answers would be kept confidential. Surveys were collected, coded, and analyzed using SPSSX on the VAX/VMS.

Literature Review

We found that television viewing, particularly watching cartoons, is a favorite pastime of many elementary students. When these children watch large amounts of television it affects their achievement, socialization, and behavior in and out of the classroom. In school, there are many televisions in the classrooms intended for educational purposes but are being used as "babysitters." This situation occurs more when a substitute teacher is in charge of the classroom and is not familiar with the subject matter. In the home, parents find it convenient to allow the children to watch many hours of television while they attend to other household chores, visit the neighbors, or go shopping. Much of the television viewing is unsupervised and is not children's programming (Reglin, 1993). In our review of literature, we discovered that the general public is becoming more cognizant of the danger of unsupervised television viewing. Ted Turner (cable network magnate) blamed TV for causing violence in America. Ted advocated a rating system and TV sets equipped to block violent programs (Duston, 1993).

We came across a substantial number of current studies

completed on television viewing. A national survey of elementary school teachers found that the popular "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" causes confusion between fantasy and reality. A North Carolina state test revealed for our county, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, that as TV viewing and absenteeism increased, time with homework dropped, and reading and math scores generally declined among more than 35,000 students in grades 3 to 8 (O'Brien, 1993).

Housden (1992) found that the amount of time children spent viewing television and the type of television programs they viewed affected achievement. Housden study revealed that watching more than three hours of television a day prevented children from engaging in other activities. Henggeler, Cohen, Edwards, & Summerville (1991) concluded that television viewing had a negative effect on academic achievement. Additionally, these researchers found that high rates of television viewing were linked with a family context that might be problematic. It is our experiences that families should be positively involved in counseling and controlling any TV program detrimental to the achievement and good school behavior of children.

According to Donahue, Henke & Morgan (1988) television has long been recognized as an agent of socialization. Television provides ample opportunity for children to learn concepts of right and wrong; and what society defines as a normal and an abnormal family. These researchers found that abused elementary children watched significantly more television than non-abused elementary children. Biblarz, Brown, Biblarz, Pilgrim, & Baldree (1991)

concluded that publicized suicide stories are followed by an increase in suicide. They found that children's reaction to violent or suicidal programs depends on the thoughts that are activated by the program.

Hypotheses/Results

Findings are presented for each hypothesis.

(H1): The excessive violence on TV is a significant contributor to the violent behaviors that elementary school students demonstrate.

H1 was supported by the data. Data from question number one were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 46.3% (19) strongly agreed and 41.5% (17) agreed. 87.8% or 36 educators indicated strongly agree or agree. 9.8% (4) was neutral, 2.4% (1) circled disagree, and none circled strongly disagree.

(H2): Characters in violent television roles are imitated more by specific groups of elementary school students.

H2 was supported by the data. Data from question number two were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 36.6% (15) strongly agreed and 53.7% (22) agreed. 90.3% (37) educators perceived that male elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in the school.

Data from question number three were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 9.8% (4) strongly agreed and 29.3% (12) agreed. 39.1% (16) educators perceived that female elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in the school.

Data from question number four were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 12.2% (5) strongly agreed and 14.6% (6) agreed. 26.8% (11) educators perceived that "White" female elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in the school.

Data from question number five were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 24.4% (10) strongly agreed and 58.5% (24) agreed. 82.9% (34) educators perceived that "White" male elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in the school.

Data from question number six were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 34.1% (14) strongly agreed and 53.7% (22) agreed. 87.8% (36) educators perceived that "African-American" male elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in the school.

Data from question number seven were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 14.6% (6) strongly agreed and 36.6% (15) agreed. 51.2% (21) educators perceived that "African-American" female elementary students imitated characters in violent TV roles while in the school.

(H3): Parents who take the time to point out that TV violence is wrong, according to societal expectations, will reduce the chances of their children demonstrating violent behaviors in the school.

H3 was supported by the data. Data from question number eight were

pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 17.1% (7) strongly agreed and 53.7% (22) agreed. 14.6% (6) was neutral, 12.2% (5) circled disagree, and 2.4% (1) indicated strongly disagree. 70.8% (29) educators perceived that parents who take the time to point out that TV violence is wrong, according to societal expectations, will reduce the chances of their children demonstrating violent behaviors in school.

(H4): Parents can reduce the chances of students demonstrating violent behaviors by screening television programs.

H4 was supported by the data. Data from question number nine were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 46.3% (19) strongly agreed and 43.9% (18) agreed. 4.9% (2) was neutral, 4.9% (2) circled disagree, none indicated strongly disagree. 90.2% (37) educators perceived that parents can reduce the chances of students demonstrating violent behaviors by screening television programs.

(H5): Educators are aware of the types of cartoons that elementary school children are viewing

H5 was not supported by the data due to the significant number of educators (about one-third) being unaware of the cartoons. Data from question number ten were pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 65.9% (27) listed one or more nonviolent cartoons and 34.1% (14) did not list any nonviolent cartoons that elementary school children commonly mimic or discuss in the school environment.

Top Three Nonviolent Cartoons

Cartoons	Number of Teachers Selecting this Cartoon
Garfield	6
Dark Wing	5
Dennis the Menace	3
Barney	3

Data from question number twelve were also pertinent to this hypothesis and revealed that 61.0% (26) listed one or more violent cartoons and 36.6% (15) did not list any violent cartoons that elementary school children commonly mimic or discuss in the school environment.

Top Three Violent Cartoons

Cartoons	Number of Teachers Selecting this Cartoon
Ninja Turtles	18
Batman	11
Simpsons	10

(H6): Violent and non-violent cartoons are used as teaching instruments in the classrooms.

H6 was not supported by the data. Only 4.9% or 2 of the teachers was using cartoons as teaching strategies in the classrooms. One teacher used cartoons in the classroom reward system and the other teacher used cartoons as part of the classroom drug awareness strategy.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data strongly suggest the need for positive interventions in the school and at home. We believe that violence in the

elementary schools is rapidly approaching the crisis stage. Teachers surveyed concurred with the majority of literature and our beliefs which point to violence on TV being one of the major contributors to violence in the classrooms. One study cited by the American Psychological Association stated that the average child will witness 8,000 made-for-TV murders before finishing elementary school.

It is imperative that legislators and educators implement curriculum and instructional strategies that coincide with the opinions and concerns of the teachers in our investigation. Teachers are sending a clear message that much of the violence on the school premises come from elementary children watching violence on TV and modeling those behaviors on the school grounds. Teachers are saying that Black males and White males are highly influenced by the excessive violence on TV. Overwhelmingly, they perceived parents to be a key factor in the solution to this problem by taking the time to explain that violence on TV is wrong and by controlling what their children view on TV.

We concur with the teachers on hypotheses one through four, however, hypotheses five and six revealed several shocking findings to us. Most of the teachers did not or could not list three violent or three nonviolent cartoons. About one-third did not list any cartoons in either category. Only two teachers used cartoons in the classrooms as teaching strategies. Could the teachers be saying that they are not aware of the cartoons that children in their classrooms are spending many hours each week watching? Are

teachers also saying that they are unaware of how to capitalize on the cartoons in the classroom as effective teaching strategies? More research must be completed in this area to address these questions.

Based on our findings and the review of literature, we offer the following suggestions for instructional and curriculum improvement in this area:

(1). There should be more funding for parental education/training to "coach" parents in tasks such as how to effectively talk with children concerning violence on TV and how to get children to view more children programming.

(2). There should be more inservice training for elementary school teachers emphasizing the children programs that are frequently watched and showing teachers how to effectively employ the children programs as teaching strategies in the classroom.

(3). We would like to see more local, state, and federal funding for programs targeted at Black and White male elementary school children to quickly counter the negative effects of the violent behaviors the teachers perceived they have copied from TV.

(4). Teacher preparation programs at universities should train preservice teachers how to more effectively use television as an instructional strategy. They should train preservice teachers in effective classroom management techniques to deal with the violent behaviors in the school through strategies such as role-playing.

(5). Congress should mandate that TV networks attach viewer warning labels or advisories such as, "Due to some violent content,

parental discretion is advised" to TV shows, especially cartoons. (6). Because electronic technology has invaded the privacy of homes by sending in television signals for programs parents don't want to see and don't want their children to see, we believe that television broadcasts should be identified with codes so that parents can block out programs coded as violent.

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